



Mission Statement

Welcome to Branches...

Our newsletter's mission is to share veterans and families life stories and personal experiences through the written word. Through our camaraderie and writing skills we will bring to the veteran community informative, entertaining, and inspirational writings. Our goal is to inspire participation in the creative writing program at Jefferson Barracks VAMC.

Sponsor

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Contributors

Creative Writing

Peer Group

2014

Female Warrior

Prior to WWI, the female gender in the U.S. Military was almost unheard of. It was the general conclusion in the U.S. that the male gender's responsibility was to provide the needed protection for their families. The female's place was to provide the home and family environment for the hard working male of the household. The male gender's job was to provide all the protection (including fighting) for his family.

Right or wrong, this was the nation's attitude towards women, men, children, and the family in the U.S. However, this attitude was slowly and quietly breaking down. With the outbreak of WWI in 1917, a new era involving the transition of women from the home to active participation in public affairs developed. For the first time in U.S. history, regular Army and Navy military nurses served overseas. Also, another step for females in public life started. For the first time, women who were not nurses were allowed to enlist in the Navy and Marine Corps. Also, the Coast Guard allowed a handful of women to enlist and serve.

However, the U.S. Army refused to officially enlist women. Rather the Army relied on women as contract employees and civilian volunteers. From the onset of WWI, women volunteered with civilian organizations such as the American Red Cross, the YMCA, the Salvation Army, and others. These organizations worked to meet our wartime needs by providing nursing, transportation, and other war relief services. This is the start of a new era for women. TK

Inside this issue

Page 1 Female Warrior

Page 2 I Was Wrong, Stand By Me

Page 3 I Love My Guitar, Joke Box,

Haiku

Page 4 My Accident, Code Breaker

Questions and Comments

I Was Wrong

I am a 63 year old Vietnam Vet living on disability and what little my wife brings in from her part time job. She works at a local fabric store selling spools of thread on "Senior Citizen Day". We have a large number of hospital bills because of a very poor decision on my part early March 2013. I thought the pain in my chest just might be a heart attack and we should get my tired old hypochondriac self to the nearest ER.

The pain felt like some outraged butcher was raking a rusty old fish scalar up and down my breastbone for what felt like an eternity. The harried young ER intern finally offered me a dose of morphine which I snapped onto like a hungry Mississippi River catfish on a big ol' lump of stink bait. A couple of hours later, he nonchalantly told me it was not in fact a heart attack. It was just the early warning signs of a busted gal bladder threatening to explode and painfully redecorate my lower GI.

So the upshot is, we are now looking at 5k in medical bills. My disability check along with her measly income doesn't come close to covering the aspirin. The good news, I need a job; the bad news, nobody will want a worn out old vet these days. Or so I thought. One afternoon as I was about to leave the Rec Center where I had been employed before everything went south, I overheard a snippet of a conversation going on behind me. It sounded like someone was asking a former co-worker of mine if he knew anyone who might be looking for a job. I couldn't help it. I turned around and stuck my big nose right in the middle and asked if he was looking for someone to fill an opening. He was. We got to talking and it sounded like my background in maintenance was exactly what he was looking for. I gave him my cell phone number and he

promised we'd get together for coffee and discuss the job.

About four weeks passed and I thought the guy completely forgot about me, when I got a call a little after eight o'clock one morning. It was the guy from the Rec Center, "would I still be interested in a job?" Absolutely. We met the next day and after finding out what the job entailed and the money and so on, I was no longer a tired ol' worn out unemployed Vietnam Vet.

You just never know when something small and seemingly insignificant can turn out to be a life changing opportunity. Keep your head up and your eyes open, the next door you open could be the one you've been waiting for. U.R. Raggs

Stand By Me

When I finished boot camp at the Naval Training Center in Great Lakes, Il., I got a flight back to St. Louis before my first training assignment. The trip to the airport was by shuttle as I recall and the flight was absolutely free, but with a little hitch. It was at that time I was introduced to the concept of Stand By. What that meant, as yet unbeknownst to me was the flight didn't cost me any money. But I had to wait till there was a flight to St. Louis and all paying passengers had boarded. If they had an extra seat left, then I was welcome.

There I was in my sailor suit with my duffle for what seemed like forever. Flight after flight seemed to be packed for St. Louis like they were heading west for a gold strike.

(continue on Page 3)

I Love My Guitar

(Continue from page 2)

Finally around one to two in the morning, a lone flight wasn't booked to the max and I was welcomed aboard with some magic piece of paper the Navy had entrusted to me. I was on my way to the Gateway City.

I think I got there around four or five in the morning. Retrieving my duffle, I sat waiting until a decent hour. Around seven, I made my phone call. All the while amusing myself at Lambert with the cleaning crew and a few early bird shops. I made it home but the expression hurry up and wait was never so imprinted on my poor conscience. Iam Builder

Joke Box

A COUPLE attended a marriage seminar on communication.

"It's essential that husbands and wives know the things that are important to each other," the instructor said. He turned to the husband and asked, "Can you name your wife's favorite flower?" The man leaned over to his wife and whispered, "It's Pillsbury, right?"

Haiku

Safe

A newborn babe
In the captains hands
America is safe
EP

I am an aging Vietnam veteran. I love music. My iPod is with me at all times. I was given a chance to take guitar lessons in the Jefferson Barracks auditorium, called "Six String Heroes"

When I arrived, I was greeted and given a name tag. The stage was busy with tentative students. The teachers were getting their name tags also.

I am conflicted to take these lessons because I cannot read music. I cannot sing very well. I have no musical back ground to support me. Also, I am a left hander, which usually is a hindrance converting right to left.

I soon met my volunteer teacher for the next eight weeks. His name is Tom. He gave me a left handed practicing guitar. He showed me how to hold a pick. We started to strum in tempo. He also showed me how to tune a guitar using a Snark tuning device. Tom is a veteran and a very nice guy with a lot of patience.

The eight lessons of this session meet every Monday at 5:30 pm. Tom had me picking up and down the six strings. While my right hand worked up and down the frets.

Now comes the hard part, cords. Tom showed me the most useful chords D, G, and C. It is hard to place my right hand fingers exactly on the frets to create a true sound, not a ringy or muffled sound. This was difficult and depressing. Maybe I cannot do this. My instructor told me that the sound will come with practice, and it did.

(continue next page)

Tom also showed me guitar tabs. Tabs are a guide to place fingers on strings and frets without reading music. I learned to play "Happy Birthday" over night using tabs.

Thanks and appreciation go to the VA JB poly trauma department, the many contributors and donors, and the volunteer teachers. They may be the real heroes.

I received the most beautiful donated guitar I had ever laid my hands on. This guitar makes me happy when days are lonely, sad, and blue. Along with my guitar, I will never be lonely again. Contact your primary care provider for referral to "Six String Hero's". EP

My Accident

Last Friday the 13th, I was speeding and lost control of my car. The swamp wasn't deep so I wasn't afraid of drowning. This was Florida and I am afraid of alligators. Sure enough, one was lurking a few yards away, sizing me up for dinner. He must have been curious about the commotion. I climbed on top of the car knowing that I needed help. I reached for my cell phone, only to discover that it had gotten wet. Here I am sitting on top of the car and wondering what to do next. I needed a weapon to scare the gator off. The only thing I could think of was a ratty, old purse my girlfriend had left in my car. Maybe he would think it was food. I threw the purse as far and hard as I could. The alligator caught it in his jaws and snapped shut on it. You had to be there to see what happened next. He opened his jaws and spit the purse out. Then amazingly, he started nuzzling the purse. He nuzzled it five or six times. Then he took it gently in his mouth, turned and swam away.

(continue from previous column).

I swear he treated that old purse like a long lost friend or maybe an old flame.

I got down, waded to shore, and climbed up to the road. I sat down to wait for someone to come by and help. WB

Code Breaker

Each number represents a letter. Figure out the code and decipher the message:

— — — — — — — — — —
6 15 11 16 26 26 16 22 19

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
7 19 6 6 5 16 14 21 9 2 15 12 2

— — —
23 6 21

Hint: E=6, T=21

Questions and Comments

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